

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk in what appears to be a library or study area. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a red patterned sweater. They are both smiling warmly at the camera. On the desk in front of them are several open books and papers. The background is slightly blurred, showing bookshelves filled with books.

Philanthropy and education: working together

Michelle Anderson reports on a national study of schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits that reveals a gap between those ‘in the know’ and those not, but also identifies better ways to build, share and exchange knowledge.



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Improving outcomes for learners is the primary aim of education, but there is common agreement that this is not the responsibility of education alone. That is why schools today increasingly work with the support of external partners, from parents and friends in the local community to philanthropic grant making foundations and trusts, as well as businesses and not-for-profit organisations. It is also why those external partners increasingly seek to work with schools by providing grants, sponsorship, awards, bursaries or scholarships, prizes or donations, as well as in-kind and volunteer support, and support in terms of relationship building within the community.

According to new research, however, those most in need of philanthropic grants and support are often the ones least equipped to seek them. The Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) study shows schools have limited knowledge about

philanthropic grant making and support, and do not always have access to, or the capacity to leverage, the additional support required to develop and implement projects or programs to address their local needs.

A three-year study of the impact of philanthropy in education, LLEAP was launched in March 2011 as an initiative of ACER's Tender Bridge. The project is in partnership with, and with funding from, The Ian Potter Foundation and the Origin Foundation. The research is exploring whether the full potential of support available from philanthropy to Australian schools is being realised. The project aims to find ways to improve the quality of grant seeking and grant making in Australia, with a focus on identifying better ways for the philanthropy and education sectors to connect and collaborate. Findings from the first year surveys were published in late 2011.

Funding and other resources

The study found that philanthropic foundations and trusts provide resources other than funds to grantees, including general professional expertise and guidance, brokering or facilitating introductions and publicity or promotion. However, most schools have limited knowledge about philanthropics and the support they offer, and typically seek funding through community fundraising activities of the school fête variety rather than grant seeking. Philanthropy tends to fly under the radar in Australia: 9 out of every 10 schools surveyed reported that they are inexperienced in the area of philanthropic grant seeking.

Legal and tax issues

One reason for this is that, in many cases, schools may not be eligible to apply directly to a philanthropic foundation or trust for a grant because the legal and tax status of foundations

and trusts, not-for-profits and schools in Australia varies within and across each sector. While these variations add considerably to the complexity of grant making and grant seeking in Australia, it does not mean that philanthropics avoid funding programs and projects in schools. Some philanthropics, such as the Myer Foundation through its small grants program, can and do support applications directly from schools while others, such as The Ian Potter Foundation, fund intermediary not-for-profits to support programs and projects in schools in terms of funding other forms of assistance.

According to the LLEAP study, the majority—about 90 per cent—of philanthropics award grants for one year. Only 20 per cent of philanthropics award grants for more than 5 years. Most award grants below \$51 000, with the majority awarding grants in the \$11 000 to \$30 000 range, followed by grants in the \$5000 to \$10 000 range.

The study found that the needs and time-frames of not-for-profits, which act as intermediaries between philanthropics and schools, can sit at odds with philanthropic funding. The key need reported by not-for-profits is for grant making philanthropics to broaden what can be funded. For not-for-profits, the top reported barrier was ‘appointing staff for a project with no guarantee of funding.’

Target audiences and priority areas

Findings from the first year of the study reveal some commonalities but also some notable differences in the target audiences and priority areas of schools, not-for-profits and philanthropics.

In terms of commonalities, programs or projects addressing students of secondary school age ranked as the number one target audience for not-for-profits and philanthropics, and third for schools. Programs or projects addressing literacy and numeracy, and student engagement ranked as the number one and two priority areas respectively for schools and

philanthropics; not-for-profits ranked student engagement equal-second, and literacy and numeracy equal-third.

In terms of differences, teacher quality was rated as a high priority area by schools, who ranked it third, but was ranked 16th by not-for-profits and 12th by philanthropics. Schools ranked digital/online learning fourth, while not-for-profits ranked it 12th and philanthropics ranked it 10th.

Three key areas for change

The study identified three key areas of change for philanthropics, not-for-profits and schools to improve the impact of philanthropy in education:

- for philanthropics – improving knowledge in terms of developments in education, priority areas to focus on, and how to better collaborate with other philanthropics and those in the education sector
- for schools – overcoming access issues in terms of tax laws that prevent philanthropic grant making to schools, and knowledge of philanthropic priority areas and processes, and
- for not-for-profits – overcoming sustainability issues in terms of the duration of grants made.

10 success factors

The study also identified 10 success factors from 250 ‘critical ingredients’ that respondents from schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits thought would reflect the highly effective engagement of philanthropy in education, these being:

- building capacity, for example, by improving the knowledge and capabilities of grant seekers
- making informed decisions through the evidence-based identification of a local need to be addressed
- improving knowledge in education and philanthropy contexts, for example, about the philanthropic foundations and trusts interested in funding education

- establishing a ‘good fit,’ by making sure that what you are seeking support for aligns with the values and objectives of the grant maker
- committing appropriate resourcing, for example, by providing longer-term grants relevant to the needs of the project or program
- improving the effectiveness of communications by creating simple and clear grant processes
- improving role clarity so that everyone knows who is doing what and why
- building relationships based on trust by following through and doing what you said you will do
- reciprocating so that partners bring their strengths to the relationship, and
- being impact focused by having some form of evaluation.

We know that outcomes for learners do not occur in a vacuum, but as the result of the interrelationship of education with mental health and wellbeing, obesity, economic disadvantage, access to products and services, and other factors. It is because of this interrelationship that school leaders actively engage with others in their communities, but philanthropy remains an under-recognised source of support and funding.

The LLEAP study reveals that there is a gap between those ‘in the know’ and those not. To bridge the gap, a practical guide on grant making and grant seeking in education has been developed. The *LLEAP Dialogue Series Guide* provides practical tips for effective grant writing and cases of effective engagement of philanthropy in education, as well as other useful tools and information. Available from the LLEAP website, the guide aims to help schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits to build, share and exchange knowledge in better ways.

For more on the Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy study, visit <www.acer.edu.au/lleap>